

Kitty Litter Cause of Returned Waste

By KEITH L. MARTIN

It seems radioactive kitty litter, and not smoke detectors, is to blame for Seamass rejecting a load of trash from the Duxbury Transfer Station on November 27.

That Saturday, Seamass officials at their Rochester incinerator denied the load because it met the company's minimum standard for radioactive levels.

At a recent Board of Selectmen meeting, Fire Chief Kevin Nord reported that the likely cause was a bulk of smoke detectors thrown away that contained ionized chips, but officials from the state's Department of Public Health (DPH) made another discovery last week.

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—Fire Chief Kevin Nord

Nord said that a control officer from the department inspected the load last Tuesday and found the source of the radioactivity was actually a trash bag containing kitty litter from an animal that likely received a recent radiation treatment, such as a gastrointestinal series.

"The source has been contained in a steel container and it will stay at the transfer station for 80 days," said Nord, who serves as the town's emergency management director. "The DPH will come back intermittently to monitor it and when the [radiation level] is below the minimum level, we'll go back to Seamass with it."

Nord told selectmen that Seamass' minimum standard

for radioactive material is .05 millirem and that the tainted bag had a reading of .155 millirem, or what he deemed a "minute source." The average x-ray exposes a person to 500 millirem, he said.

Nord said that while the exact source of the trash could not be identified, doctors usually instruct pet owners on proper disposal of waste after radioactive treatments, including flushing it into their own septic system or isolating it in a sealed container for 80 days. In this case, said Nord, the doctor either didn't give such instructions or they were ignored by the pet owner.

"There remains no public health risk from this," he said. "The biggest concern was on the part of Seamass who would've burned it, but they did not want to make this airborne. So it is now shielded and the [radioactive level] will diminish."

Nord said during his time with the Kingston Fire Department, similar incidents like this occurred several times a year, but it seems to be rare in Duxbury.

"Even the DPH workers readily admit that this is a huge part of what they do, so I'm surprised this hasn't occurred more often in Duxbury," said Nord.

He added that one way to deal with future incidents is to conduct the same inspection by the public health department, which costs nothing for municipalities, or the town could establish a screening system where equipment would scan the trash before it is discarded permanently. Nord estimated that this would cost around \$2,000.

"Other than these methods, the only other chance we have to avoid this is to educate the public about being aware of what they are throwing out," he said.